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Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

Thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration

Overview of the process followed for the production of the thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration

Note by the secretariat

1. In paragraph 2 of section IV of decision IPBES-3/1, the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services approved the undertaking of a thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration in accordance with the procedures for the preparation of the Platform's deliverables set out in annex I to decision IPBES-3/3, based on the scoping report for the assessment set out in annex VIII to decision IPBES-3/1.

2. In response to decision IPBES-3/1, a set of eight chapters and their executive summaries (IPBES/6/INF/1) and a summary for policymakers (IPBES/6/3) were produced by an expert group in accordance with the procedures for the preparation of the Platform's deliverables.

3. The annex to the present note, which is presented without formal editing, sets out a report on the process followed for the production of the thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration.

* IPBES/6/1.

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Annex

Overview of the process followed for the production of the thematical assessment of land degradation and restoration

I. Context

1. The overall scope of this thematic assessment is to critically evaluate available knowledge on the extent, causes and processes of land degradation, and the consequences for biodiversity and people; on the responses to avoid land degradation and restore degraded lands; on a range of plausible development scenarios and their implications for land degradation and restoration; and on decision support for addressing land degradation problems and restoring degraded land. The assessment encompasses all the terrestrial regions and biomes of the world, recognizing that land degradation drivers and processes can vary in severity within regions and countries as much as between them. The assessment encompasses the full range of human-altered systems, including but not limited to drylands, agricultural and agroforestry systems, savannahs and forests and aquatic systems associated with these areas.

2. The overall objective of the thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration is to provide the information and guidance necessary to support stakeholders working at all levels to reduce the negative environmental, social and economic consequences of land degradation and to rehabilitate and restore degraded land to aid the recovery of nature's contributions to people.

3. This thematic assessment was carried out by a team of interdisciplinary experts over a period of three years between 2015 and 2018. The summary for policymakers of this assessment is presented for approval at the sixth session of the Plenary (see IPBES-6/3) and the eight chapters and their executive summaries (IPBES-6/INF/1) for acceptance. The complete document is composed of the summary for policymakers together with the eight chapters and is referred to as 'the assessment report'.

II. The assessment team

A. Dedicated Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and Bureau members

4. In accordance with the rules of procedure for the preparation of the Platform's deliverables (decision IPBES-3/3, annex I), the following dedicated members of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and Bureau oversaw the production of the assessment report:

Rashad Zabid Oglu Allahverdiyev (Bureau member)

Fundisile Goodman Mketeni (Bureau member)

Günay Erpul (Multidisciplinary Expert Panel member)

Yi Huang (Multidisciplinary Expert Panel member)

Marie Roué (Multidisciplinary Expert Panel member)

Leng Guan Saw (Multidisciplinary Expert Panel member)

5. The management committee for the assessment consisted of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and Bureau members mentioned above, the co-chairs of the assessment, the staff member of the technical support unit, as well as a representative of the IPBES secretariat. Management committee meetings were held, usually remotely, at regular intervals.

B. The expert group of the land degradation and restoration assessment

6. The assessment expert group was led by two co-chairs, who oversaw the preparation of the assessment report and ensured that it was completed to a high standard. Each chapter was coordinated by two to three coordinating lead authors (CLA), and produced by a group of lead authors (LA), who were responsible for various parts of the chapter. Each chapter had two review editors, who ensured that all substantive comments were afforded appropriate consideration and advised lead authors on how to handle controversial issues, if any existed. This team of experts was complemented by at least one fellow per chapter. Fellows were experts in the early stages of their careers, who collaborated with the coordinating lead authors and lead authors in developing sections of the chapters, under the guidance of one of the experts who acted as their mentor.

7. The co-chairs, and most of the coordinating lead authors and lead authors were selected in 2015 from the original pool of nominations for experts made by Governments and stakeholders (please see IPBES/4/INF/11). Additional coordinating lead authors and lead authors were selected using the procedure for filling gaps in the availability of experts (annex I to decision IPBES-4/3), in order to reach a satisfactory gender, geographical and disciplinary balance. This procedure was also used to select review editors, over the course of 2016, and to replace a small number of experts who were asked to resign by the co-chairs, on behalf of the management committee, because they were unable to make their contribution as planned. Fellows were selected, through a separate application process.

8. The following table provides information on the number of experts selected for this assessment. A total of 99 experts prepared the report, including 22 nominated using the gap filling procedure, and excluding 20 who resigned over the course of the assessment. The full list of all experts is provided on the IPBES website:

Table 1. Number of experts involved in the thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration

Co-chairs: Luca Montanarella (FAO/Italy) and Robert Scholes (South Africa)

Co-chairs	CLAs	LAs	Review editors	Fellows	Total number of experts including fellows	Experts who resigned	Experts nominated using the gap filling procedure
2	17	57	16	7	99	20	22

C. The technical support unit

9. The Bureau, in consultation with the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel, agreed at their fifth session (13-17 April 2015 in Bonn, Germany), that the technical support unit would be based at the IPBES Secretariat in Bonn, Germany, and that a consultant would be hired to fulfil this role. The consultant, Ms. Anastasia Brainich, fulfils the aforementioned role from the headquarters of the IPBES secretariat.

10. The role of the technical support unit is to provide scientific, technical and organizational support toward the delivery of the assessment report. In addition, the role of the technical support unit is to liaise with relevant task forces and other technical support units of ongoing assessments to ensure that cross-cutting issues are properly addressed.

III. Key steps toward the production of the assessment

11. A description of key steps towards the production of this assessment, undertaken after the fifth session of the Plenary is provided below. A detailed description of the steps taken before the fifth session can be found in IPBES/4/INF/11 and IPBES/5/INF/9.

A. Second review (by governments and experts)

12. The second external review of the assessment report by Governments and experts was conducted from 1 May to 26 June 2017. The comments received were collated by the technical support unit and shared with the authors and review editors before the third and final author meeting in July 2017. A total number of 3,499 comments was received for all eight chapters, from 126 individuals, of which 16 were Governments.

B. Third author meeting

13. The third and final author meeting took place at the FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, from 17 to 21 July 2017, thanks to in-kind support from FAO. The objectives were for the experts to address the external review comments and to finalize the development of the assessment chapters. Co-chairs and coordinating lead authors also dedicated time to the development of the summary for policymakers, with support from attending members of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and Bureau.

C. Production of the final draft of the assessment report

14. The eight chapters of the assessment underwent two external reviews (by peers, and by peers and Governments), while the summary for policymakers was reviewed once by Governments and peers. The eight chapters received a total of 6,083 comments from 211 individuals and scientific groups, for both reviews. During the second external review period, the summary for policymakers received a total of 1,554 comments from 69 external reviewers, of which 21 were from Governments.

15. These comments were taken into account by the authors when producing the final draft. The entire process was supported by the review editors, who helped the authors with interpreting review comments and ensured that they were addressed appropriately by the authors. Responses to comments from both the first and second review phases will be published on the IPBES website after the approval of the summary for policymakers and the acceptance of the chapters, after the sixth session of the Plenary.

IV. Links with other deliverables

16. The expert groups of the thematic assessment (deliverable (3(b)(i)), worked closely with the expert groups, task forces and technical support units of other IPBES deliverables. There were several experts common to this assessment and the four ongoing regional and subregional assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

17. A selection of experts worked with deliverable 2(a), on the guide on assessments, by providing comments to the guide and using it in their work.

18. The expert groups interacted with the task force and technical support unit for deliverable 1(c), on indigenous and local knowledge systems. A number of regionally embedded experts from land degradation and restoration assessment were able to participate in dialogue workshops on indigenous and local knowledge, convened by the task force, for each of the four regional assessments.

19. The expert groups collaborated with the task force and technical support unit on deliverable 4(b), on data and knowledge, who provided, towards the end of the assessment process, a set of core indicators and related data and visuals.

20. The expert groups received assistance through deliverable 3(d), from the expert group on values and its technical support unit. The expert group on values assisted in reviewing the assessment chapters. The technical support unit organized several workshops in the regions to assist experts in developing content on that topic. A number of regionally embedded experts from land degradation and restoration assessment were able to participate.

21. The expert group and technical support unit for deliverable 3(c), on scenarios and models, supported the assessment by reviewing drafts of chapters 7 (scenarios and models). Several workshops were also organized with the experts of chapter 7 and the experts of the corresponding chapter 5 of the regional assessments to determine common scenarios archetypes (see IPBES/6/INF/15).

22. The expert group of deliverable 4(c), on policy support tools and methodologies, assisted experts of chapters 8 with the framing of institutions and options as well as the use of confidence terminology.

23. The task force and technical support unit for capacity building, under deliverable 1(b) assisted the assessment through the organization of the fellowship programme and the organization of writing workshops to develop the summary for policymakers.